

16th Sig. Bn. ends second Iraq deployment

By Capt. Ryan Bardo

16th Sig. Bn.

Lt. Col. Marc Harris and Command Sgt. Maj. Terence Farmer of the 16th Signal Battalion uncased the unit's colors in front of Soldiers and family members Jan. 31 at Howze Auditorium.

The uncasing of the unit colors officially marks the end of the battalion's year-long deployment to Iraq.

The 16th Sig. Bn. deployed 521 personnel to Kuwait Jan. 11, 2005, and immediately commenced operations and preparations for movement into Iraq to provide communications support to Multi-National Brigade North West, or MNB-NW.

By the end of January, the battalion had conducted three major ground assault convoys of over 700 miles from Kuwait to Mosul, Iraq, to deliver communications capability to MNF-NW. The battalion completed its Relief in Place and transfer of authority with the 115th Signal Battalion six days ahead of schedule on Feb. 4, 2005, immediately following the first Iraqi National Elections.

Units from Fort Hood provided communications in a variety of ways. Through the use of Mobile Subscriber Equipment, signal units set up node centers and small extension nodes that make up the backbone of Army communications networks.

Similar to local telephone companies, 'node centers' are the processing center for communications where telephone calls and data transfers are received, routed, encrypted and decrypted. Extension nodes are the receiver-transmitter pieces of the signal company that remain with the supported unit.

One can think of the small extension node as the phone jack in a subscriber's wall, and the node center as the local telephone company office.

Over the course of the deployment, the battalion expanded the MNB-NW network from three node centers and 12 extensions to six nodes, one large extension, and 28 small



Photo by Capt. Michael Greenberger, 3rd. Sig. Bde. PAO

Command Sgt. Maj. Terence Farmer and Lt. Col. Marc Harris uncased the 16th Sig. Bn. colors.

extensions as MNB-NW grew from a brigade to a division.

The expansion facilitated the transition of Task Force Olympia to the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment-led Task Force Freedom consisting of 1/25th Infantry (STRYKER) Brigade, 917th Corps Support Group, 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army Divisions, and numerous tenant units spread throughout the area of responsibility.

The battalion further expanded its network to facilitate the addition of the 3rd ACR to TFF, thus increasing communications support from six base camps to a total of 12, ensuring tactical MSE capabilities were provided as far the Iraq-Syrian border to include the villages of Rawah, Sinjar, Baij, and Rabiya.

The battalion also provided communications liaison officers and support to the Army of the Republic of Korea in Multi-National Force North East and to the U.S. liaison officer to the Turkish Army in Silopi, Turkey.

As part of "Operation Cool Down," the battalion constructed 45 wood shelter structures with air conditioning and insulation to protect com-

munications installations from sand and heat. These structures maintained temperatures in and around the equipment to less than 85 degrees despite outside temperatures of up to 120 degrees.

The battalion also conducted a full electronic communications and vehicle service program, or "deep clean." Preparing for the deep clean, the battalion constructed a permanent motor pool and wash rack facility and an electronic maintenance pad at Mosul Airfield.

While expanding and improving the tactical network, the battalion also dedicated significant effort to developing a commercial network in the MNF-NW area of operations to reduce future demand for tactical signal assets.

The program began with improvements to the MNF-NW Headquarters at Camp Courage by upgrading the existing wiring infrastructure and installing a Vantage switch and commercial call manager. In Irbil, the battalion assisted commercialization of the MNF-NE Headquarters by installing a commer-

cial switch and encryption devices. As a result, both headquarters received commercial secure and Voice-over-Internet-Protocol service.

The battalion applied significant effort and executed a plan to commercialize the Q'West Base Complex to prepare for its expansion to become one of four contingency operations bases in Iraq.

Cable installers improved and added to existing conduit systems to establish a flexible and expandable commercial fiber optic cable infrastructure that can provide commercial access throughout the camp.

The battalion also constructed a technical control facility to house commercial switches, installed a commercial satellite terminal for long-range communications, and trained numerous personnel on the communications systems through the Baghdad and Coalition Forces Land Component Command Universities.

In recognition of providing true multi-national forces support, the battalion also provided tactical MSE communications for the 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army divisions and their Marine and Army communications teams as well as technical support for their high-frequency radio systems by developing an Arabic reference guide for operation and basic troubleshooting of the equipment.

The 16th Sig. Bn. has clearly left a positive mark as the primary communications provider to MNF-NW and a successful contributor to the greater MNC-I network, according to Harris.

There was not a single communications requirement the battalion turned down or could not meet throughout their Operation Iraqi Freedom III deployment, Harris said. The initiative, aggressiveness and morale of the 16th Sig. Bn. Soldiers were pivotal in enabling this unit to provide quality tactical and commercial communications to the warfighter through the battalion's second Iraqi Freedom deployment, and made its mark on the War on Terror.